

Stafford Court House Buildings
Stafford County, Virginia.

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District VA.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Philip N. Stern, District Officer
21 Law Building, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

STAFFORD COURT HOUSE BUILDINGS

Stafford County, Virginia.

Owner: Stafford County, Va.Date of Erection: C 1790 - 1850Architect: Unknown.Builder: Unknown.Present Condition: Demolished.Number of Stories: Two. for one building; one for the others.Materials of Construction: Brick, stone and stucco.Other Existing Records: Unknown.Additional Data: (See following pages).

THE OLD COURT HOUSE BUILDINGS

Stafford Court House, Virginia.

These buildings were destroyed about twenty years ago when the new highway was constructed. No records of the structures beyond the old photographs here reproduced seem to be extant. There is no plan showing the arrangement of the different buildings, but inquiries show that the old court house stood in approximately the same position as the present building, the Clerk's Office stood to the northeast, facing south and the jail to the east, on axis with the Court House, and on a site that would be in the middle of the present highway.

The Court House was a T-shaped building with the leg of the T to the west. It was plastered, probably on brick, with wood trim. The facade would seem to have been about fifty feet long and about 18 feet ^{high} from a slight offset water table to the cornice. A doorway centered on the front and two tall windows flanked it on each side. The windows would seem to have been three lights wide and four high, producing a very large light size. The staff beads were narrow, as were the muntins, and the openings were equipped with blinds. There was little attempt at enrichment of any of the openings, as far as one can determine from the photographs. The doorway was largely covered by a storm porch, but the overdoor shows to some extent. The portion showing is too small to analyze but may have been similar to the entablatures over the windows. These seem to have been merely a deep cove, cut off at the ends, instead of returning on themselves. The member below the cove on the nearest window on the view from the southeast, would seem to be an addition, perhaps the box for a Venetian blind or awning. The end walls were blank, the fireplaces being located here as the chimneys testify. There were return windows on the west elevation of the main building, one on either side of the west wing. This wing was no doubt used as the court room, as is customary in Virginia court houses. This use would seem to be borne out by the sills of the windows being raised above those of the main wing, as seen in the view from the northwest.

The roofs of the building are gabled, at the pitch of the Classic pediment and the gable ends are expressed as pediments. In the tympanum is seen a semi-circular recess simulating a lunette. The chimney occurring directly behind the lunette would make it seem certain that the latter was never glazed. The roof was covered with metal, with standing seams.

The Court House is of the Classic Revival Style and was probably built about 1840 to 1850. The other buildings were earlier though it is difficult to assign a date to the Jail, as it lacks any detail that would give such a clue. The Clerk's Office, on the other hand, is fairly architectural, and probably built about 1780-1790.

The Jail was a stone built building, about twenty feet square. The material was probably Aquia Creek sandstone, dressed and coursed. The Aquia quarry is situated only a few miles away. The building was two stories high, having probably only one room on each floor. The upper room, was reached by a flight of stone steps and the lower story was entered from the grade. The upper story was possibly for white prisoners and the lower for colored. In the photograph the outside steps can be seen and the doors by which the upper and lower rooms were entered and the upper window on the west side. All the openings are plain rectangles, with a heavy stone sill at the bottom and a similar lintel at the top. The apertures are guarded by heavy metal grilles, probably of strap iron on oak frames. The window, however, seems to have the iron let into the stone itself. The cornice at the eaves, is merely boxed. The chimney, perched on the ridge, does not seem to be original.

The Clerk's Office ¹¹³⁵ is a plain gabled brick structure approximately thirty-six feet long by twenty deep and about twelve feet in height between base course and cornice. The north and south elevations seem to have been similar, but as the north side is obscured in the photograph by vines, it is the south elevation of which most is known. On this is centered a fairly low doorway spanned by a stone flat arch rusticated to represent four voussoirs which support a central fluted keystone. The door as seen in the photograph can be considered modern. The wide frame with the backstand would seem to be original, here as in the windows, as would the paneled shutters, closed over the windows. These shutters were evidently original, and the top panels were square and rather delicately moulded. Probably the lower part of each shutter was divided into two equal panels, below the square top panel. The window arches were similar to the door. The window keystone engages the soffit of a narrow stone cornice, evidently moulded with a oove, under a quarter round. The return at the gable can be clearly seen in the view from the northwest. The window sills are stone, moulded with a nosing at the top. The base course is also stone and would seem to be a torus under a scotia. This was probably above a low stone foundation. The stone here is doubtless also Aquia. The front elevation is laid in Flemish bond and on the side in common bond.

The close relationship between the Clerk's Office and contemporary work in Alexandria and Dumfries is very evident.

Thomas T. Waterman

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